

LGBT+ digital activism. Notes for a communication conceptualization

Activismo digital LGBT+. Apuntes para una conceptualización comunicacional

Ativismo digital LGBT+. Notas para uma conceituação de comunicação

Raul Anthony Olmedo Neri¹

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
México

raul.olmedo@politicass.unam.mx

Abstract: Incorporating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Internet into the structures and repertoires of contemporary social movements has developed concepts that aim to account for this techno-communicative assemblage. However, most of these proposals stem from an approach that reduces the use of ICT and the Internet to an instrumental dimension, thus minimizing the reconfigurations they entail when practicing and investigating current forms of activism. Therefore, this article seeks to develop a coherent concept of digital activism from a communicational perspective to identify its characteristics and the analytical implications that arise from the subject-technology-communication relationship. To accomplish this task, the analysis of the Mexican LGBT+ movement provides for this task because its experience empirically demonstrates the diversity of uses and meanings that ICT and the Internet can acquire for a contemporary social movement. This work concludes that digital activism promotes asynchronous, deterritorialized, disembodied, and reticular forms of action by the individuals who comprise a social movement; analytically, digital activism is not limited to the political arena but centers its impact on the symbolic dispute present in everyday life. Finally, from the communicational perspective, digital activism invites us to make visible the uses and meanings of those actors who, through the Internet, recalibrate their position in the hybrid public space and redefine their profiles to embody new forms of struggle.

Keywords:

¹ Afiliación institucional: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales. Estudiante del Doctorado en Ciencias Políticas y Sociales. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5318-0170>

Everyday life, digital culture, communication mobile, sociodigital platforms, social movements

Resumen: La incorporación de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) e Internet en las estructuras y repertorios de acción de los movimientos sociales contemporáneos ha generado el desarrollo de conceptos que pretenden dar cuenta de este ensamblaje tecnocomunicativo. No obstante, la mayoría de estas propuestas nacen de un enfoque que reduce el uso de las TIC e Internet a una dimensión instrumental, por lo que se minimizan las reconfiguraciones que acarrearán a la hora de hacer e investigar las formas actuales de activismo. Por ello, este artículo busca desarrollar un concepto coherente del activismo digital a partir de la perspectiva comunicacional, con el fin de identificar sus características y las implicaciones analíticas que emergen de la relación sujeto-tecnología-comunicación. Para ello se recurre al análisis del movimiento LGBT+ mexicano porque su experiencia muestra empíricamente la multiplicidad de usos y significados que las TIC e Internet pueden adquirir para un movimiento social contemporáneo. Este trabajo concluye que el activismo digital promueve formas asincrónicas, desterritorializadas, descorporizadas y reticulares de acción por parte de las personas que integran un movimiento social; en términos analíticos, el activismo digital no se limita a la arena política, sino que centra su impacto en la disputa simbólica presente en la vida cotidiana. Finalmente, desde la perspectiva comunicacional el activismo digital invita a visibilizar los usos y significados de aquellos actores que con Internet recalibran su posición en el espacio público híbrido y resignifican sus perfiles para encarnar nuevas formas de lucha.

Palabras clave:

Vida cotidiana, cultura digital, comunicación móvil, plataformas sociodigitales, movimientos sociales

Resumo: A incorporaco das Tecnologias de Informaco e Comunicao (TIC) e da Internet nas estruturas e repertrios de ao dos movimentos sociais contemporneos tem gerado o desenvolvimento de concepoes que buscam dar conta desse agenciamento tecnocomunicativo. No entanto, a maioria dessas propostas parte de uma abordagem que reduz o uso das TIC e da Internet a uma dimenso instrumental, minimizando assim as reconfiguraoes que acarretam na realizao e investigao das formas atuais de ativismo. Por isso, este artigo busca desenvolver

um conceito coerente de ativismo digital a partir da perspectiva comunicacional, a fim de identificar suas características e as implicações analíticas que emergem da relação sujeito-tecnologia-comunicação. Para isso, utiliza-se a análise do movimento LGBTQ+ mexicano porque sua experiência mostra empiricamente a multiplicidade de usos e significados que as TICs e a Internet podem adquirir para um movimento social contemporâneo. Este artigo conclui que o ativismo digital promove formas de ação assíncronas, desterritorializadas, desencarnadas e reticulares das pessoas que compõem um movimento social; Em termos analíticos, o ativismo digital não se limita à arena política, mas concentra seu impacto na disputa simbólica presente no cotidiano. Finalmente, do ponto de vista da comunicação, o ativismo digital convida a tornar visíveis os usos e significados daqueles atores que, com a Internet, recalibram sua posição no espaço público híbrido e ressignificam seus perfis para encarnar novas formas de luta.

Palavras-chave:

Cotidiano, cultura digital, comunicação móvel, plataformas sociodigitais, movimentos sociais

1. Introduction

As Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the Internet are integrated into everyday life, they indirectly reconfigure the (re)productive structures and dynamics of everyday life to give it a new sociocultural meaning. Although the digital divide is still present in Latin America, there is a government trend in the region to reduce it and thus guarantee its coverage and access (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, given the growing massification of these techno-communicative elements in society, it is essential to identify and analyze how their incorporation into individual and collective dynamics generates a range of potential social uses that, until before their launch, had a limited nature and unidirectional under the logic and structures of the mass media.

In the case of social movements, mainly since the beginning of the 21st century, technological devices and digital space take on a strategic role to facilitate forms of organization and action in the public space (Castells, 2015). These uses not only emanate from those intended by the designers of the interface, but the material and historical conditions of the subjects who appropriate the technology allow the design of innovative and disruptive uses that transcend the

predefined operational logics and their purposes (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Rovira Sancho, 2017).

Although the sociological perspective has made analytical approaches to the relationship between social movements and technology, its strategy has contributed to relegating and minimizing the reconfigurations that these techno-communicative innovations generate in social movements, their structures, and repertoires of action (Mattoni and Treré, 2014; Rovira Sancho, 2012; Olmedo Neri, 2022b). A consequence of this has been, for example, the proliferation of concepts that attempt to define contemporary activism that is articulated with ICT and the Internet, such as click activism, cyber activism, and online activism, among others, all of them maintaining in their conceptual core a contempt for the scope of its sociotechnical assembly.

Given this panorama, the objective of this article is to provide epistemological coherence to the concept of digital activism to highlight its analytical particularities and thereby remove its apparent limitation in the study of current social movements. In this way, not only will the potential of digital activism be vindicated, but an alternative way of thinking about and addressing this phenomenon will also be offered from a communication perspective.

To achieve this goal, we have structured the work in three sections: the first builds a general overview of how the role of technology and communication in social movements has been understood from a sociological perspective. Subsequently, the concept of digital activism is constructed from the communication perspective, from which it is proposed to think about the hyperconnected society within a continuum between the non-digital and the digital. In the third section, a study is made of the analytical proposals made through the experiences of the Mexican Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans (from now on, LGBT⁺²) movement, given that its relevance in the region is not only inserted in the field of political but has had an expansion to the field of communication and culture. This is intended to account for a current phenomenon of growing analytical importance, which requires being studied from an interdisciplinary perspective and highlighting the particularities of its communicative function.

Before addressing the relationship between social movements and the Internet, it is necessary to clarify the definition of activism, a key concept for this work. At first, it is possible

² The plus sign (+) refers to all those assemblages between sexual orientation, gender identity and expression that materially or symbolically contravene the canons of heterosexism and heteronorm, placing their exhibitors in a position of oppression and subalternity.

to understand activism as a voluntary, conscious, heterogeneous, historically and materially determined form of individual action with collective impacts on the structures and dynamics of society (Fimovich Jvoshev, 2010). In addition to this, activism not only has a political and social character but also has a deep communicative meaning since the search to transform reality implies an individual/collective effort to make visible a position in the world that is peripheral or generates tensions. With those dominant visions (Flores-Márquez, 2017). From this, we can understand that activism is a process, and whoever carries it out becomes an activist.

Beyond thinking about activism in its individual/collective dichotomy, it is possible to propose thinking about it on two levels: individual and symbolic. At an individual level, activism is a decision that is born from the subject about and in the face of the person's reality, which is why it implies a commitment to oneself to transform the historical moment that one lives/constructs under the principles that one seeks to achieve through specific strategies and/or actions. These principles can become comparable with others, thus generating joint projects that lead to a social movement. Therefore, activism at this first level is a subjective decision to be a participant in the production and realization of demands that can be sought by a social movement, enabling their adhesion and collective participation (Pérez Zúñiga et al., 2015). At this first level, activism is general. It allows all social movement members to be recognized as activists per se, derived from their simple adhesion and participation in it.

The second level of a symbolic nature contains a relational dimension since, according to the degree of participation of the subject in the actions carried out by a social movement and the visibility that said person obtains in the public space, it can be progressively recognized as an activist. At a symbolic level, activism becomes an attribute that others give to a person, among other things, due to 1) the level of commitment to the transformation that the movement demands and 2) the growing impact of their actions in the spheres where one wishes to intervene and 3) the ability to personify the demands of the social movement in the different spheres of social life and to defend them against their detractors. Therefore, although all members of a social movement are activists in a strict sense, only those who effectively impact the realization of the demands of said movement end up being recognized and legitimized as such inside and outside its structure as a consequence of the social capital that he possesses and increases through his individual activism.

Hence, a 'legitimate' activist is not recognized as such but one who is recognized by others given their qualities and the level of commitment to realizing the project that said movement creates and pursues. As will be seen later, the predominant perspective on the study of social movements has focused on the study and recognition of symbolic activists, privileging their voices and experiences over those other de facto activists who lack, by intention or omission, said explicit attribute in space and public opinion.

The differentiation made about activism will be essential because it allows us to propose how, with technological devices and the digital space, these analytical distinctions are reconfigured by putting the members of a social movement on equal techno-operational conditions, decentralizing the focus of analysis and action on who have social, political and symbolic recognition in the public space (Flores-Márquez, 2017; Olmedo Neri, 2022a).

2. Social Movements and the Internet

In the study of social movements, the sociological perspective occupies a central place because it emphasizes the forms of collective action and the agency capacity of the subjects to transform social reality and, with it, the power asymmetries under which they are (re) produces (Almeida, 2020; Durand Guevara, 2016). The conflicts that motivate/trigger social movements, the internal organizational dynamics, the construction/use of action repertoires, the materialization of their agenda, and the disputes/opportunities that occur in the political sphere are classic themes from this analytical perspective that It bifurcates into two major currents: the structuralist and the culturalist at the micro and macro social level (Almeida, 2020; Jasper, 2012; McAdam et al., 2004; Castells, 2015; Melucci, 2010; Touraine, 2005; Pleyers, 2018).

In sociological theories on social movements, the media, ICT, and the Internet occupy a peripheral place in the analysis, given the interest in social action and not in the mediation it can acquire through the communication-technology pact. Since the 21st century³ - particularly with the Arab Spring - there has been a progressive interest in addressing how ICT and the Internet

³ Until before the Internet, the media were seen more as resources that operate in an oppressive function because they only respond to the interests of their owners and the links that they establish with the other powers present in society. As a result, the idea of total domination of its content over audiences has been strengthened, denying them their ability to interpret said content based on their condition and social class position. This has minimized the theoretical interest in the relationship between social movements and media even though empirically social movements have always sought not to disrupt media content and even take over their own media, although with varied results (Olmedo Neri, 2021, 2022b).

can be helpful resources that expand the scope of the demands of social movements in society, as well as the possibility of that people can dislocate classic forms of (re)production of power (Almeida, 2020; Pleyers, 2018; Tilly and Wood, 2010).

This process of inquiry and theoretical reflection can be defined as a techno-communicative turn in social movements because it implies an epistemological and attitude change regarding the presence and function of technological innovations on a phenomenon that demands to be studied beyond a theoretical framework and already consolidated. In other words, given that the media, ICT, and the Internet have a transversal and increasingly relevant effect on the subjects that make up a social movement, their collective structure, and how they are made visible in society, the techno-communicative turn states the need for an analytical repositioning on the pre-function sense and future of communication-technology, both in the conflicts that motivate the birth of contemporary social movements and in their internal and external dynamics. For this techno-communicative turn to be fruitful, it must be based on interdiscipline.

Until now, the techno-communicative turn of social movements from the sociological perspective has been limited because most of the approaches made to this empirically observable relationship have endeavored to question the effectiveness of technology within the demands of a social movement and to ossify communication under a rational and instrumental dimension. Proof of this is the theoretical reflections that have been used in terms such as click activism, armchair activism, online activism, cyberactivism, or cybermovements, among others, which conceptually detract from the ontological implications of technological innovation on social movements because they do not promote action nor the appropriation of public space and because its impact will hardly be able to lead to political transformations (Han, 2016; Henríquez Ayala, 2011; Millaleo and Velasco, 2013; Treré, 2016).

All of these proposals have in common: 1) they maintain a technophobic essence towards ICT and the Internet, 2) they reduce the objectives of every social movement to the political-legal arena, and 3) they insistently differentiate activism inside and outside the Internet. These shared premises have been the subject of systematic criticism by those who investigate social movements from a communication perspective, showing that these assumptions are limiting and, in some cases, obsolete (Candón-Mena, 2013; Mattoni and Treré, 2014; Rovira Sancho, 2012; Sierra Caballero and Sola-Morales, 2020). Below is a summary of these criticisms.

The pessimistic essence of technology and the Internet not only conceals the dialectical relationship that these innovations have with society but at the same time the technophobic view is strengthened by highlighting the "covert" economic and political interests of their owners/promoters and concluding that its function continues to be oppressive by converting user-operators into agents prone to be alienated, monitored and now also datafied, apparently denying them the critical capacity to understand, apprehend and disrupt said processes (Poell and Van Dijck, 2018).

When criticism is restricted to the political and economic dimension of technology, all possibility of intervention in operational logic is eliminated, and any counter-hegemonic alternative to the interests and power structures that operate on the other side of the interface is suppressed. This suppression gives the idea that user-operators do not recognize these powers, contravening the efforts of some social movements that not only fight against them on the Internet but, in strict terms, are building their tools and platforms (Candón-Mena and Montero-Sánchez, 2023; Lago Martínez et al., 2021). These disruptive exercises attempt to reduce asymmetries, starting with the digital divides and transcending to the contents and interfaces that reproduce the dominant and colonizing structures (Gómez Cruz, 2022).

Regarding the analytical framing of the movements' objectives in the legal-political arena, it is observed that this arena is just one of the battlefields for social change to materialize. Some research on social movements, ICT, and the Internet insists on recognizing that the demands of social movements do not end with their legal or political recognition. Still, for these demands to be fully exercised, there is a transcendence of the transformation to the framework of everyday life where culture and communication play a strategic and conflictive role (Binder, 2019; Olmedo Neri, 2022a). In other words, the cultural rights that are sought to be achieved through their legal framework necessarily transcend the everyday dimension, turning everyday life into a field of symbolic dispute, that is, a space where tensions are generated between the world visions that seek to impose and, in some cases, justify and legitimize the grievances that motivate social movements to act.

Finally, the insistence on differentiating offline from online activism operates under a contradiction that falsely excludes the real and the digital. Currently, this contradiction lacks empirical substance: neither the real is foreign to the digital, nor does the digital lack reality (García-Estévez, 2017). Instead of maintaining this contradiction, it is necessary to think about

its articulation in an online context (Floridi, 2015), where the subject develops a heterogeneous and particular process of assembly that incorporates technology according to its needs and possibilities. In this process, the prefix cyber and the adjective virtual must be deleted since they maintain the false contradiction between the real and the digital in their conceptual cores.

In short, to address this complex relationship between social movements, ICT, and the Internet, it is necessary to move away from those terms whose epistemic cores reproduce their minimization. For this reason, digital activism aims to emerge conceptually and theoretically as a term that enunciates a contemporary and expanded form of non-institutionalized activism, whose focus of interest is not only the political sphere but daily life, its structures of meaning, and its symbolic matrices. This is why, for specific social movements, activism articulated with ICT and the Internet finds greater affinity with their structures and transformation objectives.

Given this panorama, proposing a term born from a communication perspective becomes valid because it allows us to understand and explain the techno-communicative implications of social movements not from the subject of the technology or vice versa but from the relationship that these elements build in a dialectical and sociohistorical way.

3. Communication perspective and digital activism

The communication perspective is not only a theoretical framework, but at the same time, it is a place of epistemological enunciation that allows the identification of the communicative dynamics of a social phenomenon to explain its other constitutive dimensions (Craig, 1999). The communication perspective is based on the subject-technology relationship, recognizing that its manifestation is plural and heterogeneous in relation to the elements that intervene in it and its degree of strength. In this sense, the subject-technology relationship is determined by the (im)material and historical conditions of its manifestation so that it can be understood and analyzed at different scales of social analysis (Miège, 2015). Thus, the subject-technology relationship operates under horizontality and dialectics: the subject intervenes in the production and meaning of technology, while technology intervenes in the subjectivity and place of enunciation of the subject.

In other words, the subject-technology relationship is heterogeneous. It depends entirely on the social, material, and historical conditions in which it develops, which is why the

communication perspective does not start from a canon but shows the multiplicity of ways said relationship can be acquired in social reality.

By recognizing the complexity of the subject-technology relationship and making its sociohistorical framework explicit, we avoid moving toward technological determinism or falling into technophobia. In addition, the communication perspective does not seek to impose itself on a phenomenon; on the contrary, it tries to reveal those other processes that escape the analytical gaze of other social sciences. In this way, the communication perspective does not conflict with other sciences. Instead, it shows how communication as a process and social science has a transversal character in the constitution of society, so it cannot be thought of only in its instrumental dimension. But from the subject-technology relationship, it is possible to think about other manifestations and metaphors that give new meanings to its conceptualization and empirical representation (Sfez, 1995, 2007).

From the communication perspective, digital activism does not operate under a contradiction between the real and the digital but, in reality, manifests itself in a continuum between these two extreme poles. The continuum metaphor allows us to reconcile the exclusion worked at the beginning of the integration of ICT and the Internet in daily life. Still, it also implicitly recognizes that finding processes with a pure real or digital anchor in today's society is complicated. The very opposition between real/digital is diluted to be thought of under their interrelation: not digital-digital.

On the one hand, the idea of a continuum between the digital and the non-digital, as well as a convergent context of framing contemporary activism, are recent proposals that approach the field of social movements and problematize the social reality they seek transform (Kasnik, 2023; Olmedo Neri, 2022b). This notion, however, requires greater conceptual work to clarify its potential analytical and explanatory capacity.

Given that the integration of ICT and the Internet in subjects' daily lives is heterogeneous, the dichotomous and exclusive vision between the non-digital and the digital fades away to give way to a context where the forms and actions of appropriation of technological innovations are created from convergence. Thus, the continuum is not a condition specific to the subject but rather a context in which it is permanently developed and from which it evaluates and defines how to assemble the digital with the non-digital to obtain a specific purpose.

In this sense, digital activism does not intend to claim technology as a limiting field of manifestation but rather as a characteristic factor. For this reason, digital activism brings together a heterogeneous and plural set of strategies, resources, and actions that pursue different purposes. Still, technology and the Internet have a structural and symbolic function without which said objectives would be affected in some way, for example, duration, scope, visibility, or the possibility of becoming a memory resource. This includes strategies such as digital campaigns and email to construct social movement platforms (Candón-Mena and Montero Sánchez, 2023; Millaleo and Velasco, 2013).

The following image aims to schematically show the notion of continuum and how it could be used analytically in digital activism.

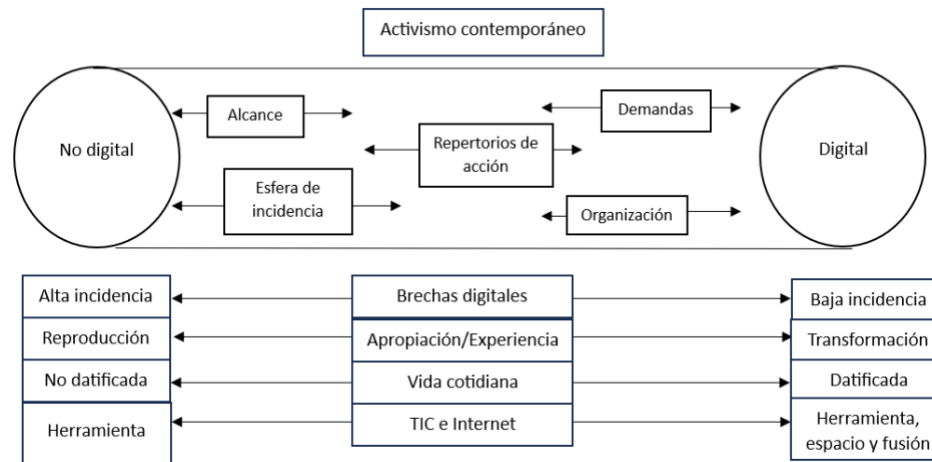


Figure 1. Continuum scheme in digital activism. Source: Diagram created by the author.

In this way, the objectives pursued and the resources used by a social movement oscillate in this continuum, so digital activism can be considered a general term that allows us to state this complex and plural field. The factors that intervene in this continuum are expanded to the extremes to show how they intervene in the context where digital activism is developed, impacting the consideration made by the activist when defining the type of action to be developed in their reality.

From the above, it is possible to define digital activism as a positioning and commitment of the individual himself to transform his reality through specific purposes, where ICT and the Internet can be used and conceived as a tool, as a space, and/ or as a sociotechnical extension support. Thus, digital activism brings together a set of practices and repertoires of action where technological-digital support is crucial for realizing its objectives, which are deployed to other areas beyond politics, thus taking on diverse manifestations and meanings.

Once digital activism is defined, it must be characterized by its sociotechnical particularities. Firstly, digital activism cannot be considered without the Internet or its reticular infrastructure (Castells, 2015; Olmedo Neri, 2021; Peirone, 2012). With the Internet and particularly with socio-digital platforms, the objectives of a social movement are not limited to expanding or making its agenda visible. On the contrary, they have a greater capacity to intervene in public opinion by turning their members into potential producers, consumers, and disseminators of its counterhegemony and, above all in participating in the political deliberation of citizens and society in general (Pleyers, 2018; Rovira Sancho, 2017).

In this way, movements are dedicated to presenting their vision of the world and seeking to transform society's perception of their demands to guarantee their legitimacy. In other words, ICT and the Internet not only improve the participation of social movements in public opinion but also discuss and put their problems and demands on the agenda to transform, among other things, the social representations that oppress them. We are, therefore, faced with a process of production, consumption, and dissemination of counterhegemonic narratives that emanate from the subject and are projected through the decentralized spaces it produces on the Internet.

The reticular structure of the Internet is crucial in understanding digital activism and the analytical reconfigurations that emanate from it. With the digital space, symbolic activists and civil organizations are decentralized as privileged subjects within the study of social movements because the digital space gives visibility to the other movement members who remained at an individual level of activism until then. This, paradoxically, strengthens their relationship: if the symbolic activist could do without individual activists and still have an impact in the public space, on the Internet, the impact of his actions and speeches will depend on his ability to address the user-operators that are in these spaces and that can exponentially enhance the visibility of their strategies/content.

Under this process, digital activism empowers user-operators. It allows the subjects to temporarily detach themselves from their peripheral position in society and within the social movement to which they belong and intervene more effectively in the public sphere.

In other words, digital activism not only contravenes the vertical structures of power but simultaneously breaks with the spirit of horizontal action because, in the latter, it is assumed that all subjects are in equal conditions to participate and be seen. What happens on the Internet is that technology reduces power asymmetries at the productive, consumerist, and disseminating levels between people. Still, it does not suppress certain subjects' prestige in the public space.⁴ Thus, digital activism is based on a reticular structure of action, where the content and strategies of organization or participation acquire a contingent virality due to the structural condition of where it is projected and the interpellation it generates among user-operators.

⁴ Thus, socio-digital platforms are not horizontal, but reticular because the subjects are placed in equal technological conditions, but their position and recognition in the public sphere gives them a strategic place in the network. This does not mean that the asymmetries are maintained, on the contrary, it opens the opportunity to recalibrate them through the strategic use of the interface and the resources it offers.

In specific terms, the characteristics and sociotechnical implications that various authors have attributed to digital activism (Betancourt Gracia, 2015; Candón-Mena, 2013; Castells, 2015; Olmedo Neri, 2021, 2022b; Reguillo, 2017; Rovira Sancho, 2017; Treré, 2020), can be summarized in:

1. *Atomization of the social movement.* By having equal techno-operational conditions, the members of social movements claim their potential individuality to strengthen the collective dimension to which they belong. That is, collective actions transcend the subjective dimension and gain greater strength because, on the Internet, the user-operator can filter its content to receive/consume what said user wants. Ultimately, whoever decides to use their profiles or digital spaces to produce, consume, or disseminate information/content can do so without expecting a transcendental impact beyond their local field of action.

2. *Personification of activism.* Given that on the Internet, the subject makes his own spaces to interact with others when he subscribes or recognizes himself as part of a social movement. There is the possibility that said profile exposes this militancy from the textual/visual information he places in his profiles to reach the narrative level by creating or sharing content, which indirectly gives the perception to other user-operators of their affiliation to said movement. In short, activism is possible from the subject's experience, who may or may not be linked to an organization or enjoy recognition in the public space.

3. *Cost-benefit ratio of media.* The high cost of investment and maintenance required and the technical-operational knowledge of the medium were constant limitations for social movements to create their own media. With the Internet and ICT in society, the cost of investment and maintenance is reduced, and the administration of communication channels is facilitated to obtain digital media without reducing the scope of dissemination and impact. The benefit-cost relationship for having a medium is reoriented to content production. To the extent that there is a professionalization of content, it will necessarily require an infrastructure investment.

4. *Deterritorialized action.* Given that the Internet operates as a supranational technological infrastructure, there is the possibility of accessing counterhegemonic narratives from other coordinates and realities. This allows us to transcend the territory's limitations to enable articulation through experience and the dialogues that arise from this between those who wage the same struggle in other spaces.

5. *Asynchronous duration*. Counterhegemonic narratives and spaces produced by and for social movements are neither created nor destroyed. They are only stored; they do not lose substance as long as they remain helpful to the needs of their creators and participants. This possibility of permanence indirectly converts the profiles and spaces created into places that house and protect the memory of activism and the social movement from the subjectivity of the user-operator.

6. *Disembodied presence*. If the maxim of non-institutional activism is there, in digital activism, it is not necessary to put the body, but rather, put the profile. The spaces created by user-operators become a simile of the body, but digital. Not only does the design of the identity converge there, but also the ability of the subject to question his hybrid reality and participate in it, so putting the profile in the struggle of a social movement implies a voluntary commitment that allows not only to transform the profile into an amplifier of counterhegemonic narratives but instead being, in short, just another trench from which what is necessary to transform reality is done.

7. *Daily life as a field of incidence*. Digital activism operates on the sociocultural frameworks that manifest themselves in everyday life. It aims to transform social reality and the cultural and social frameworks under which it is reproduced. Here, symbolic dispute is manifested, and contemporary social movements also wage a permanent battle.

Once digital activism and its characteristics are defined, empirically observing these elements through a particular case is possible. The Mexican LGBT+ movement is an excellent example of the management and impact of contemporary digital activism.

4. LGBT+ digital activism in Mexico⁵

In Latin America, the LGBT+ movement - together with the feminist movement - is contributing to the political, ideological, and media catharsis that reconfigures and recalibrates the power asymmetries that manifest beyond the political arena. These social movements articulate their demands to everyday life because their sociocultural and political matrices house the grievances they try to transform (Binder, 2019; Martel, 2013; Touraine, 2005).

⁵ The elements presented here are based on various research developed in recent years on the Mexican LGBT+ movement, as well as on the first empirical investigations developed for the current doctoral thesis in progress, which addresses the ways in which ICT and the Internet operate in the LGBT+ youth experience.

The people who make up the LGBT+ movement have a historical subalternity, given that the assembly they make individually between sexual orientation, identity, and gender expression contravenes the heteronormative structure that shapes social reality. The historical struggle of the LGBT+ movement in Mexico and Latin America has oscillated between realizing their political rights and public recognition in daily life (Díez, 2018).

The search for this social movement to have its media relies on the objective of dislocating the negative symbolic load that has been attributed to LGBT+ populations from the heteronorm (Pérez, 2018; Irys, 2018). In Mexico, the communication projects born from this social movement have had reach on the radio, in the press, theater, and cinema. However, their intermittent duration and the (im)morality they represented then made them volatile (Olmedo Neri, 2021).

The integration of ICT and the Internet into daily Mexican life led to the emergence of the first LGBT+ digital media in the late 90s and early 21st century, such as NotieSe (founded in 1998), the Sexual Diversity News Agency (ANODIS, created on June 28, 2002), as well as the first gay TV channel on the Internet (GLink.TV, founded on March 28, 2008), among others (Olmedo Neri, 2022b). For members of the LGBT+ movement, the Internet becomes a counterhegemonic space from which it is possible to overcome discrimination and stigma to give way to new socialization processes born from the gender-based dissidence that they embody (Martel, 2013). Anonymity, the removal of geographical barriers, and the possibility of being on the Internet allow LGBT+ people to create safe spaces between and for themselves.

The oldest open Facebook group found on LGBT+ populations in Mexico is focused on organizing its participants to defend the approval of equal marriage in the country's capital in 2009 (Olmedo Neri, 2020). After that, particularly with the massification of the digital space and ICT in society, more group channels on YouTube began to increase, and communication projects focused on satisfying the informational and cultural needs of Mexican LGBT+ populations, the same as today. They have a regional scope (Pérez, 2018).

Although the use of digital space was gradual for the LGBT+ movement during the first two decades of the 21st century, it was mainly with the pandemic that there was a more intense process of integration and appropriation. The 2020 Pride march is a transcendental phenomenon for the LGBT+ movement because it showed the organizational and creative nature of its members to digitize a historical strategy that was potentially impeded by the probability of

contagion (Kasnik, 2023; Olmedo Neri, 2022b). In other words, with the pandemic, the Mexican LGBT+ movement had to devise hybrid mechanisms of participation and action so as not to lose its presence or the relevance of its historical action repertoires, such as the march as a sign of appropriation and resignification of public space.

The 42nd Mexico City Pride march was characterized by a broadcast on Channel 11 - a national public television channel - and on different socio-digital platforms for over 10 hours (Marcha LGBTI CDMX, 2020). Its public access allows it to continue to be seen even after completion. Its content and execution show the framing of its agenda with mass and digital media to achieve a specific goal that only makes sense under that material, historical, and cultural context. The content was not only conceived from the programming of the march, but also the user-operators intervened by sharing said transmission on their respective profiles and becoming producers to share a video marching in their homes together on their Twitter profiles. to the tag #ElOrgulloPermanece (Olmedo Neri, 2022a). The following figure shows some of the comments that can be read on the YouTube channel of the organization of the Pride March in Mexico City.



Figure 2. Comments from 42 CDMX Pride March. Source: Marcha LGBTI CDMX (2020).

The first comment shows that the field of digital activism stands out, generating gaps in the cultural matrices to reaffirm the legitimacy of their demands and struggles. This content

invites us to think about the potential digital impact that a strategy that historically had a non-digital predominance can aspire to.⁶

The importance of this digital march not only lies in what its realization entailed but in what it left for its subsequent commemorations: the following year, the 2021 Pride march in Mexico City was not only characterized by retaking place in the streets, but at the same time transmissions were made from various pages and user-operators who maintained this practice not for their benefit, but for those others who, due to various circumstances, could not post the body, but could post the profile. This means that the digital dimension was maintained. Still, its presence was not reduced, evidencing how a historic collective action today acquires hybrid features typical of the non-digital-digital continuum in which it develops.

Currently, some LGBT+ civil organizations carry out advocacy actions at a social level with groups of young people who meet in person and digitally. Activists tend to request support to spread some act of discrimination and tag the official accounts of the institutions so that they take action on the matter; LGBT+ young people use the Internet to search for a test that tells them if they belong to an LGBT+ community or if what they feel for other people is normal or morally sanctioned; Increasingly, meet/zoom talks are taking place between groups from different states or Latin American countries, which are transmitted on various platforms and stored for later consultation in their channels/profiles; LGBT+ people use dating applications to make sexual encounters or expand their social support networks. These examples show that uses are variable, all determined by the subject-technology relationship. Not all LGBT+ people perform the same actions, nor do they all give the same meaning to ICT and the Internet.

These individual and seemingly unrelated activities are part of the reticular action of digital activism, with which the LGBT+ movement advances everywhere and in all directions, showing its ubiquitous nature in contemporary society.

5. Conclusion

We are facing a complex context that offers new forms, experiences, and possibilities of activism. This forces us to work and rethink epistemological positions to apprehend and explain reality. In this work, a conceptual effort has been made to locate the role of ICT and the Internet

⁶ This did not prevent attendees from taking photos and/or videos in previous marches to upload them on their respective profiles as a sign of their affiliation to said movement and struggle.

within current social movements and build a coherent notion of digital activism from a communication perspective.

The relevance of this conceptual work lies in giving an appropriately communicative vision to a phenomenon that can no longer relegate the relevance of technology and communication in its constitution. Thus, digital activism emerges from the subject-technology relationship, so its manifestation is heterogeneous and is historically and materially determined by the technological device and the place of enunciation of the subject.

The proposed contributions demonstrate the scope of this form of hybridization of the action of social movements without falling into the techno determinism or technophobia under which it has been immersed. It is necessary to continue strengthening this notion by analyzing social movements from a communication perspective.

The effort to characterize digital activism does not seek to impose it as a finished and totalizing form of contemporary activism; on the contrary, it offers tools to think about and claim this dimension within the analysis of current social movements. Finally, the approach to the LGBT+ movement and the digital activism it exercises allows us to recognize these elements and how each use acquires historical and social particularity.

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